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PRESERVATION

NPS Takes Action at Channel Islands

Undercover operation leads to arrest in park artifact theft.

SANTA CRUZ ISLAND, CALIF.—Following up on a tip from a local Chumash tribeswoman, the National Park Service launched a two-year undercover operation that culminated in the seizure of more than 900 Native American artifacts and the January arrest of island resident Brian Krantz. Krantz has been indicted on charges of taking human remains from a Native American burial ground, a felony; and harming archaeological resources, a misdemeanor.

The eastern end of Santa Cruz, one island in the archipelago of Channel Islands National Park, came under Park Service care in February after several years during which the agency shared control of the 6,300 acres with a private landowner. Francis Gherini held onto a 25 percent ownership share after his three siblings sold their shares to NPS in 1989 and 1993. Despite Park Service concerns, Gherini maintained a lease agreement with Island Adventures, a company that offered kayaking and hunting trips on the property.

Island Adventures employed Krantz as a hunting guide and caretaker at Smugglers Cove, where a historic adobe housed the company's clients.

Posing as a wealthy hunter, NPS investigator Todd Swain booked several trips with Island Adventures and went undercover on Santa Cruz Island three times between August 1995 and December 1996. On each occasion, Krantz served as his guide. Between hunting and fishing excursions, Krantz led Swain and his partner, Jeff Sullivan, on tours of Native American cultural sites, including a burial ground and a midden, or refuse heap.

According to Swain's search warrant affidavit, the investigators watched as Krantz dug into a grave site with his bare hands, pulling out skull, rib, and



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Artifacts were seized at this adobe, now part of Channel Islands National Park.

jaw bones. Swain covertly tape recorded much of the digging sounds and conversation while Sullivan took photographs of the excavated bone fragments. Krantz offered the men their choice of the bones as souvenirs but cautioned them that possessing or even disturbing Native American remains is illegal. A forensic anthropologist later identified the bones as those of a prehistoric female Native American.

Swain and Sullivan also say they observed Krantz pocket artifacts, including a "donut stone" used as a weight on a digging stick, and that the guide later placed this object on display alongside scores of other artifacts at the Smugglers Cove adobe.

In January, the Park Service obtained a search warrant and collected a helicopter-load of artifacts and other evidence that resulted in Krantz's arrest and indictment. The objects included bowl fragments, shell beads, mortars and pestles, and manos and metates—portable grinding stones and surfaces.

"Santa Cruz Island offers world-class resources, and this investigation shows why it's high time for the island to be fully protected as part of Channel Islands National Park," says NPSA Pacific Regional Director Brian Huse.

"The Park Service ran a top-notch investigation, but some people are claiming that these are trumped-up

charges designed to justify NPS control of Santa Cruz," Huse says. "The fact of the matter is that this investigation began more than two years ago as the result of a citizen's tip. The property has been under the sole care of the Park Service since February, and the former owners are required to vacate by May. That has nothing to do with this case."

In a separate action, Congress authorized a Park Service buyout of Gherini's share of the property on Santa Cruz Island as part of the omnibus parks bill that passed last fall. Former Rep. Andrea Seastrand (R-Calif.) sponsored the measure that resulted in the first legislative taking since 1988, when a Virginia developer was forced to sell a Civil War battlefield rather than build a shopping center there.

Channel Islands park archaeologist Don Morris says little can be done to reverse the damage done to the island's cultural resources. "When material is moved from context," he says, "objects of antiquity have no voice to tell us about their past." But Santa Cruz still has a wealth of archaeological resources, he adds, and a comprehensive survey is under way.

Krantz is free on bail while awaiting trial. He also faces misdemeanor charges for guiding without a license and for shooting a raven, a migratory, nongame species.